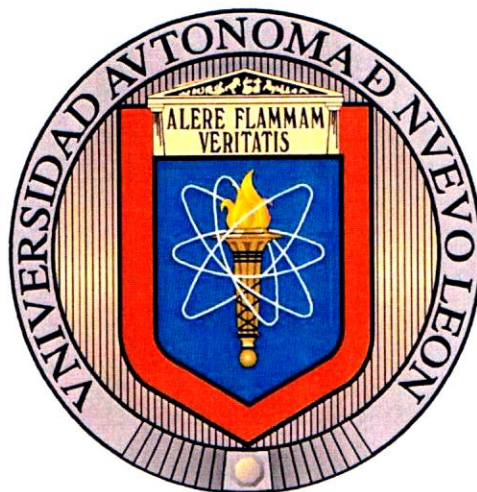


UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE NUEVO LEÓN

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DIVISIÓN DE ESTUDIOS DE POSGRADO



THE USE OF MOBILE-ASSITED LANGUAGE LEARNING TO
ENHANCE YOUNG ADULT EFL STUDENTS' ORAL PRODUCTION

POR:

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COMO REQUISITO PARCIAL PARA OBTENER EL GRADO DE
MAESTRÍA EN LINGÜÍSTICA APLICADA A LA ENSEÑANZA DE
LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS

ASESOR:

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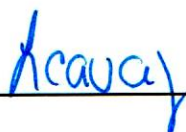
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Abstract

The current research paper emphasizes the importance of enhancing oral skills in young adult EFL students. Nowadays, being able to communicate in English has become a must for many people. In Mexico, the need to speak English increases day by day (most jobs require people to do so). This study takes place at a school where English courses are based on a communicative approach, but even with that emphasis, students continue to have difficulties to communicate in the target language.

Fortunately, with the use of technology there are more possibilities so students can continue learning autonomously when they are outside the classroom. Therefore, the focus of this research will be on mobile-assisted language learning, and on how students may benefit from it to enhance their oral skills while being outside the classroom. As a result, it would be expected for learners to feel more confident when they speak, and to improve their communicative abilities as they conclude each level.

Introduction

On a language learning course, speaking is a key to promote communication. Therefore, the methods and the tools selected by the teacher to foster learners' oral practice should be considered as the most important resource. In order to learn a foreign language, one of the alternatives is to practice and use the language in different situations, however, having EFL learners to speak in class is one of the challenges that teachers usually face.

The present research takes place on a private school. One of the many programs this school contributes with, is a governmental program. In said program, the students are young adults who want to learn English to communicate, but many of them face the problem of not being proficient in speaking once the course is over. From the many causes of this problem, lack of time to develop speaking activities in class is one that is worth highlighting. Hence, something that may help students improve will be to practice speaking outside the classroom.

As stated by Lai (2017), providing out-of-class learning environments establishes an important context for successful language development. Successful language learners are generally engaged in different out-of-class language learning activities. If a teacher wishes to develop language skills, not only inside, but outside the classroom, there are many ways to do so. Also, Nunan (1991) states that, successful language learning in a variety of contexts all around the world is usually associated with the learners' ability to continue learning English when they are outside the classroom.

Considering the importance of language learning opportunities that may take place outside the classroom, Lightbown and Spada (2006) argue that in settings different from the classroom, the foreign language is learned naturally. Similarly, out-of-class language learning increases

cooperation and motivation and enhances students' confidence and self-esteem. As well, Hyland (2006) suggests that foreign languages can be learned and practiced in any place and at any time outside the classroom context. These previous ideas stand as a good argument of the benefits that learning brings to students when they find themselves learning English outside the classroom.

Besides, many second language acquisition (SLA) researchers favor the role of informal environments in the language learning process. For instance, Krashen (1982) claims that the aim of language teaching is to enable students to use the target language not only in the classroom, but also in the real world. He also argues that meaningful exposure to the target language both in formal and informal linguistic contexts is necessary for SLA. Consequently, this paper looks for a way to enhance students' communicative skills by asking them to carry out different activities (out of class), that will enhance their oral production.

Problem statement

The specific program that this research will deal with, provides young adults with the opportunity to study English. It focusses on developing the four basic language skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Even though, it is possible to observe that as students acquire vocabulary, understand texts, and use grammar correctly, they still have trouble communicating in English. Sometimes, students who are competent on a test do not have the capacity to express orally.

There may be different reasons to explain why students are not capable to express what they want. According to Rahmani (2014), sometimes students can feel intimidated, pressured by time or by their own partners; some others, they just lack the vocabulary needed to say what they want to say, and, therefore, students end up using their mother tongue to communicate. It is also

important to consider teachers' talking time versus students' talking time, the fact of just a few pair or group activities done during the class, the teacher who speaks in Spanish the whole time, and the lack of planning to improve oral production. As a consequence, there is a need for a strategy to help students overcome these difficulties.

The site where research takes place is an institution characterized by offering communicative classes and by promoting speaking among the students. This could seem out of place as many students are not proficient English speakers by the end of the whole English course. Hence, this research paper will deal with the lack of oral production that exists, in order to improve students' oral skills.

Justification

English has become one of the most important languages around the world. According to Crystal (2003) it is a global language, and it will allow you to be in touch with more people than any other language. Therefore, there is a need for students to have good language skills.

Nevertheless, acquiring and developing oral production in English is a struggle faced by teachers and students at every level in English teaching institutions. Oral skills are hard work, and it is necessary to pay special attention to them if the desired goal is to have students who are proficient English speakers at the end of the course, especially when the kind of approach an English program has claims to be communicative, and classes are not communicative at all.

As English teachers, it is important to provide learners opportunities to develop oral skills at the highest level. Through the years, many studies have indicated that oral language development has been neglected in the classroom. Most of the time, oral language is used more by teachers than by students. The problem is that when English is used by the teacher it does not function as

a tool for students to gain knowledge. Therefore, it is relevant to explore this area and to provide different alternatives for the problem.

As it was mentioned previously, communication is the key factor of a language. Since the origins of the old civilizations the main goal has always been to be able to communicate with each other. It is not enough to know one's mother tongue, globalization requires everyone to learn at least a second language. Once you get in touch with people from other parts of the world who know two or three different languages you realize one is not enough. If we talk about Mexico and its proximity to the United States, people look forward to learning English as a foreign language.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that nowadays students' main wish is to be able to communicate, and even when it may sound like a hypothesis, it is a fact. Learning a new language may be useful in order to take an exam and get a certification, but in fact the main goal is always to communicate. Therefore, oral skills should not be set apart or left alone, they must be considered as the most important element on an English class. Teachers need to learn how to deal with them and to enhance them.

Objectives

The main objective of this research is to describe the benefits that technology provides for students when learning a foreign language. The two specific objectives are listed as it follows:

1. To identify in which ways Whatsapp helps students to enhance oral skills.
2. To evaluate the impact of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning has on students.

Research questions

According to the previous objectives, the present research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Which are the benefits that technology provides for students when learning a foreign language?
2. How can Whatsapp be used as a tool to help students enhancing oral skills?
3. Which is the impact Mobile-Assisted Language Learning has on students?

The general objective intends to describe the benefits that technology provides for students when they have the purpose of learning a foreign language. In that way if other teachers read this paper they will find out and probably try to replicate the use of technology in their classrooms.

The first specific objective of this research implies the use of Whatsapp (which is a free app that most students use for daily communication), as a tool to enhance students' oral skills through the use of audios. Finally, the third objective looks to evaluate the impact that Mobile-Assisted Language Learning have on students once they experience using their cell phones to learn.

Studies addressing the problem

Through the years, different teachers and researchers have also felt the need to wonder if there are ways to get to improve students' oral production. Either because students lack confidence or vocabulary, or teachers lack strategies to enhance oral skills. Reasons to conduct similar studies are diverse, and in the following section some relevant studies will be presented. Through their analysis it will be possible to find out why this kind of study is feasible and relevant.

Vahid Rahmani conducted a research in 2014 on behalf of the students who are not very confident when being inside the English classroom. The problem detected was that, when learning a second language, learners tend to be passive and quiet; despite this, nowadays it is a must for EFL teachers to look for ways to enhance students' confidence to help them participate in the class. An action research was therefore conducted; its main objective was to increase students' confidence in speaking.

The participants were university students from different fields of study. All of them were male students, with an upper intermediate level. All of them, as well, were participants in a general classroom in a private institute in Iran before the research project began. About the research design, students completed a questionnaire at the beginning of the semester; then, the teacher incorporated extra speaking activities. At the end, the questionnaire was re-administered to see if their confidence had increased.

Some findings were: first, that before employing a certain strategy to help students, teachers need to be conscious about their students and the attitudes they have towards oral production in order to find out the reasons for their lack of confidence. In the second place, action research was considered as a very helpful resource in this case, as it brought positive effects both, for teachers and students. From here, the final and most important conclusion the author made, is that as a teacher, it is necessary to take, as well, the role of a researcher in the classroom.

On the other hand, Takeshi Sato, Fumiko Murase, and Tyler Burden conducted a study dealing with mobile-assisted language learning in 2015. As a background for this study, a previous one was made, and Sato participated in it too, this study revealed that, the automatization of vocabulary recall could be enhanced by using mobile devices. The main problem was that students were usually passive (as in the first action research study conducted

by Rahmani). They were content by listening to what the teacher had to say and expected to receive knowledge from him only. Therefore, this study had the aim to look for the advantages that Mobile-Assisted Language Learning can provide, focusing on the ones that helped students to learn vocabulary in an EFL context.

The participants were ninety-seven engineer undergraduate students in a Japanese university. Some of the authors were English teachers over there. These teachers divided the participants in two groups, the first was the control group and the second an experimental group. The control group was asked to memorize aforementioned phrases with a translation in a paper list, on the other hand, students in the experimental group needed to acquire said phrases using their smartphone together with an online learning tool called Quizlet.

The findings of this study showed that MALL enhances the recall of the target language, besides, teachers perceived that students in the two groups had slightly increased their level of autonomous learning at the end. It is also important to mention that MALL does not only help students recall the target language easily, but it also increases their motivation towards vocabulary learning. The main conclusion implies that there is a need for more examination on learning a foreign language with the use of advanced technology, emphasizing on how motivational it can be for students.

Another interesting study is the one made by Sandra Ramírez, and Marco Artunduaga in 2018. The main purpose was to motivate students to enhance their oral production and make the learning process more meaningful by using tasks. This study emerged from the idea that achieving oral production is difficult for most teachers, the problem can be reduced to the strategies they use (these do not engage students). Besides, in high school English courses

consider reading and writing as the most important skills, in order to prepare students for tests. Therefore, oral skills do not receive sufficient attention.

For this project, researchers followed action research parameters. The participants were eight students from the tenth level, who had been in the school for more than three years. They were selected in terms of schedule and availability. Most participants were basic users (A1), this condition was determined through a diagnosis test called “Retos al Saber”. About the design, firstly, teachers implemented observation; then, they applied a survey to know about students’ opinions on the problem. Finally, the implementation of special tasks was done, and data was collected through video, interviews, and field notes.

Based on the findings it can be assured that authentic tasks, which are related to students’ daily lives produce a positive effect in terms of engagement and confidence-building. In this way, teachers can negotiate with students about what they want to learn, in order to ensure that it will be something useful. Another benefit is that students become evaluators of their own performance. As a conclusion, regarding the general objective of this study it is certain that participants were more willing to speak in class as a result of being involved and engaged during the implementation of tasks.

Additionally, Coskun contributed with another research in 2016. The problem he detected was that Turkey is in the very low proficiency level in EFL proficiency, because in this context students are only in touch with the language when they are inside the classroom. Therefore, this study had, as a main objective, to research on the benefits of speaking activities that were performed out of class. The participants were students at an English Translation and Interpretation department, members of a state university in Turkey.

The sample consisted of twenty-one years old students who decided to participate in extracurricular speaking activities. The research was a qualitative study, based on survey questions that were open-ended and dealt with the students' opinions. After that, all the participants carried out a speaking activity meant to last for six weeks. Students had to get together twice a week outside the classroom, progress was monitored. Once the activities ended students received a survey dealing with their activity's description.

Some of the finding of this study were, in the first place, students' favorite speaking activities, together with their benefits as perceived by students. As a conclusion, it was possible to establish that, there are actions that need to be taken to allow students another alternative to learn when they are not in the classroom. With the right planning, should be aware that it is possible to learn by themselves outside the classroom.

As well, Wu, Chen, and Yang decided to conduct a study in 2017 to find out the benefits that creating an online learning community could represent for the enhancement of learners' oral proficiency. The problem they faced was that, due to inadequate communication and interaction, and still with many years of English practice, speakers have difficulties to master the oral skills and feel uncertain when it is necessary to speak out loud. This study paid special attention to the effect of an online learning community in a flipped classroom.

The participants were fifty second-year English-major students, registered in mandatory English oral training classes in Taiwan. All of them had studied English before, for around eight years. Students' proficiency was upper intermediate. Conventional lecture-based instruction was given for the first eight weeks, then the teacher changed into flipped instruction for eight more weeks. The instructor chose a textbook designed for advanced students (Good Chats), together

with a smartphone app (LINE) to form online learning communities. The perceptions students had of the flipped experience were examined.

Analysis of pre-tests and post- tests, surveys, interviews, and class observation indicated that LINE is good to create a learning community online, together with a self-paced learning context. The app also helped creating a collaborative environment, where tasks which are meaningful for learning take place before the class to enhance oral fluency of participants. And the most important, students became more engaged in learning, both at their homes and in the classroom. As a conclusion, oral proficiency was highly enhanced thanks to the construction of an online learning community.

With their study in 2016 Rueb, Cardoso, and Grimshaw pretended to introduce a digital game that worked with gaps. As well, they wanted to investigate learners' perceptions of its use in a context where French was learnt as a second language. The reason they decided to carry on the present study is because, sometimes, there is a lack of oral interaction, and said competency is required in everyday talks. Besides, whenever oral skills are developed, it has many benefits, as an example, students tend to become motivated to provide feedback on what the interlocutor is saying.

In this study the participants were twenty-eight students who were part of an intermediate level of French as a second language class in Québec. The main goal was for them to develop writing, listening, reading and speaking skills. The treatment consisted of game-playing two times per week, over a four-week period. For this purpose, they used a version of the game with four different scenarios. Afterwards, participants completed a survey and participated in interviews.

According to some findings, apparently, participants found the game to be enjoyable and helpful for language learning. They also felt that the game helped improving the language they were learning (in this case, French), and agreed that it was a fantastic option to learn a language. The game also increased the students' willingness to communicate, plus, it was collaborative. As a general conclusion, this game seems like a good tool to help students improve their oral skills in a way that is fun and interactive.

On the other hand, according to the study Pop, Tomuletiu and David carried on in 2011, speaking practice can be improved by using asynchronous voice tools. This will guaranty lots of benefits for students. Sometimes, students' expectations and motivation are low, due to their classes being consistent (the same activities and routine every time), or due to their lack of commitment. The main objective is to help adult students learning the language in a class environment that is artificial.

To carry out the study, a needs analysis was done with students from the first year in a university in Romania. This previous analysis revealed that students had commitments that prevented them from attending classes on a regular basis. They also had mixed ability levels and needs and were used to learn on an informal and extensive way. As a result, two apps that are voice tools were trialed, as a way for student to carry speaking and listening activities in an out-of-class practice.

Feedback was obtained digitally, and through the end-of-semester interviews. Motivation was expected to be the outcome of this study; seemingly, there was a positive response to the virtual tools. Students felt excited and proud, but, most importantly, the factors of learners' different personalities, their learning pace, and language proficiency that led to lack of participation to speak up in class or in groups were eliminated in the digital environment.

For their part, Torres and Rodríguez established in 2017 that one of the biggest limitations that EFL learners have in the process, is that there are not a lot of chances for them to practice speaking in a different place from the classroom. Moreover, in classrooms with big groups, where the practice of speaking and the hours per week are reduced, learners' speaking production is scarce and problematic. The main objective of this action research is to use project-based learning, in order to give students chances to develop their speaking skills.

This research was carried out in a public school in Bogotá. Learners had not been in contact with English, and their class was scheduled for just three hours a week. Thirty ninth graders participated on the study, having a basic English level. In order to promote oral production, students had to create three projects, thanks to these projects, students were forced to speak English to achieve communication needs (every project was related to students' personal lives and environment). It was difficult to get to complete the projects, and time-consuming as well. It was not easy for learners to use English immediately; it was a really slow process.

In the end, all of the data that had been collected during the process revealed that Project-Based Learning plays an important role in learners' lives. It helps to increase their language competence, because during the process they had a strong need to learn and use vocabulary to express ideas and to complete the tasks. Thanks to this experience, students were able to find peer support strategies, that will later help them to cooperate with each other in the construction of meaning in English.

Similarly, the main goal of another study developed in 2017 in the same area of knowledge was to investigate the benefit of Mobile Mediated Communication, in order to expand the oral skills in second-language learners. Andújar and Cruz see a need to focus into improving second language oral skills, first, because there is a wide range of previous studies that have got

beneficial results; second, because students lack the oral skill more than they lack any of the other skills. Even when all of them are equally important, it is true that in the modern era there is an emphasis on being able to communicate.

This study considered four groups; each group consisted of twenty students. Afterwards, learners were divided in two groups, each with forty students. Participants were Spanish students from the University of Almeria taking a B1 English course. Students who were part of the experimental group joined a Whatsapp group consisting of forty students. In here the interactions took place (learners were not allowed to write, in order to force them to speak). English use was mandatory, a different student had to formulate a different question every day, any topic could be chosen; after that, each student had to offer at least one answer.

Once the process finished, it was clear for researchers that mobile learning provides students with an environment where they are able to negotiate meaning, and, at the same time, they can reflect and evaluate their own performance thanks to authentic interaction and feedback. This kind of technology offers a powerful tool to get to develop second language speaking proficiency.

In addition to the previous research, AlSaleem conducted another study in 2018. The oral skill is very wide, it encompasses correct pronunciation, putting ideas in a logical order, expressing them through vocabulary that goes accordingly, and so on. Mostly, oral skills require high levels of thought and thinking processes that seized their importance through cognitive productive and complicated processes done in many steps.

If the nature of oral communication skills is considered, learners who speak other languages should learn how to pronounce, how to use signs and gestures, and how to use non-linguistic

movements to express their ideas. As well as stating the right order for an English structure while speaking. Improving communication skills helps learners to speak without hesitation. It is true that Facebook is not commonly conceptualized as a way of learning, but many researchers have explored the impact that it has on learning in higher institutions.

Therefore, the researcher conducted a pilot study, with a sample of twenty learners. The sample showed that most English learners have difficulties to practice oral communication skills. This study employed the quasi-experimental design, the participants were divided in two groups, an experimental group and a control group. The difference was that the experimental group learned by using Facebook activities (to develop oral communication skills). In the end, a post-test was applied, and results were better for the experimental group; based on that, the researcher recommended to apply the same activities to different groups and levels, such as elementary and secondary school, as well as college.

A different study, by Peña and Onatra in 2009 made clear that language is used less confidently by learners in secondary schools, and this has become a challenge for many teachers. Truth is, it is very important for students to be able to communicate, to be able to express their ideas, and to say how they feel so that they are understood by other people. Also, effective communication gives both, teachers and students the opportunity to create a better world. The aim of this study is, therefore, to use the task-based learning approach to promote oral production.

The learners involved in the study were Colombian students, who were part of the seventh grade and had to participate in some extra activities after their habitual classes. The actual participants were selected randomly. In the beginning a diagnosis was made in order to discover

students' speaking level; researchers collected the rest of the information by means of field notes.

In the end, one of the most important findings of this research had to do with mistakes. According to both authors, mistakes are important, because they allow the individuals to monitor their learning process. Also, it was concluded that having learners to speak is rewarding and demanding at the same time, because there are many elements that need to be considered when dealing with oral skills. Most importantly, in order to see confident speakers in a task it is necessary to consider: the use of vocabulary, the practice of intonation patterns, as well as other language aspects.

Another case of study developed in 2008 by María Georgina Fernández, an English as a foreign language teacher at the School of Languages, turns out to be relevant. The main purpose of her research was to improve oral production in adult students of English as a foreign language (EFL) of intermediate level at the Language Center of Universidad Autónoma de Baja California (UABC). The method she used was a case study-based action-research project, that consisted of an intervention program which implemented a set of interactive speaking activities; these activities included learning strategies, so that students could improve oral production.

In order to collect information several instruments were designed. A questionnaire for English teachers was designed, as well as a questionnaire to describe the subjects of study, together with a self-assessing questionnaire. The intervention plan consisted of the application of a set of interactive speaking activities. The implementation of said activities will form reflective mini cycles; first the teachers shows the learning strategies, then, students practice learning strategies. Next, students asses their performance, and data is analyzed.

According to the main findings of this research, it has been proved that through the application of interactive speaking activities that include learning strategies, strategy training, a careful selection of the speaking activities, and a nice environment, the oral production of adult EFL students of intermediate level improved considerably. This can be exemplified by considering the following aspects: students lost their fear to speak, their lack of vocabulary was not a big problem; students were taught with useful language before each activity. As well, strategy training enabled students to get ahead in the activities.

One last case of study is the one Irma Martinez did in Monterrey Nuevo León in 1998. The problem was that English courses that were based on a communicative language- learning approach, could not provide enough oral participation among all the students, as there was a large number. Students were limited, because of the lack of meaningful activities in the amount of classroom time. The purpose was to find new ways to practice English orally inside and outside the classroom, and to realize if extra activities could help students improve their oral proficiency.

Two groups of the same level were selected in order to compare the one engaged in additional interactive activities and the one that was not. This comparison will reveal if additional activities helped enhance student oral communication skills. The method applied was true experimental research, to corroborate if the application and practice of specially designed oral activities could help students improve their oral production skills.

Once the study was concluded, the questionnaire revealed that students felt a lot of satisfaction and obtained many benefits by dedicating more time to practice their oral skills. Students also said that they had enjoyed participating in activities where they could speak freely. The final evaluations showed that the experimental group's performance was better than the

control group. Although the teaching methodology was similar in both groups, the improvement in students' oral production as well as in their written evaluations can be attributed to the extra activities that the experimental group engaged in.

About the background studies which are similar to the research that is being conducted, it is possible to say that there are many, but the most important thing is that none of them has been carried out in the same context. Therefore, this research can offer something completely new in its area and place of study.

Theoretical framework

It has been stated that it is a challenge for students to get to develop their oral skills. Indeed, it is a challenge for them to be able to learn another language. It implies lots of practice, and it is important to dedicate lots of time to successfully complete an English course. In this theoretical framework, different concepts that provide a wider context of the origins of this research paper, will be presented and analyzed. The theoretical framework will consist of four major topics that appear as it follows: Autonomy in language learning, Communicative language teaching, The oral language skills, and Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL).

1.1 Autonomy in language learning

Firstly, the concept of autonomy will be revised. According to Benson (2013), the idea of second language learning has been present since many years before institutionalized learning came into the picture. He claims that, even now, in the new era, lots of people still learn foreign languages without having the advantage of receiving formal classes. As such, autonomy itself has a history of approximately three decades, having its origins as an answer to different ideas brought to life by the political turmoil originated in Europe in the end of the 1960's.

Therefore, the Council of Europe's Modern Languages Project aimed initially to provide adults with opportunities for lifelong learning. In that epoch, autonomy was the capacity to take charge of one's own learning. As years passed by, throughout the 1970's and 1980's, autonomy came to be closely associated with the concept of individualization, which also took the form of programmed learning, this implying a model in which learners work at their own pace, utilizing materials prepared by teachers (Benson, 2013).

Also, according to Benson (2013), one of the main characteristics of research on autonomy in language learning is that it pretends to look for sources beyond the field of language that can provide students with insights, and an intellectual guidance. Most of the times this is what is missing from students, as there are many tools out there, but it can be difficult for them to recognize each tool, and even more, to get to learn how to use them on their own.

Now, as it was previously mentioned in the beginning, this research project is aimed towards young adults, and it turns out that research and practice in the field of adult self-directed learning were the ones that brought up the most immediate influence on the theory of autonomy itself. Self-directed learning is a term used to describe a process where individuals take the initiative when they have to: diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying learning resources, choosing and implementing learning strategies, and evaluating outcomes (Benson, 2013).

Then, according to Little (1991) autonomy can be described as a capacity that deals with detachment, together with critical reflection, decision-making and interdependent action. It implies for learners to develop a relation to this process, and it is possible to see that it is working once the learner transfers what he has learned to a variety of different contexts. Learners have

lots of freedom, but it is true that this freedom is not absolute, but always conditional and constrained.

Another important definition of autonomy is the one provided by Dickinson in 1987, he states that the term describes a situation in which the learner is completely responsible of every decision concerning his learning, and the implementation of those decisions. Dickinson's idea is that when autonomy is fully applied there is no involvement of a teacher, and the learner becomes independent of prepared materials. This could imply that the teacher, the institution or the materials may set learning objectives that will reduce the possibility for autonomy to take place (Fabela, 2012).

On the other hand, Holec (1981) shares a similar perspective of the concept of autonomy, but instead of considering this as a capacity, he talks about it as an ability that students have in order to take charge of their own learning, taking responsibility for every decision that has to do with it; in this case, learners determine their objectives, define their progress, select the methods they will use, monitor the process, and last but not least, evaluate the knowledge acquired. Therefore, Little's and Holec's perspectives have some things in common.

On the contrary, Benson (2013) has a view of the concept which seems more structural, he makes a distinction and divides the concept in three broad ways of talking about autonomy; the technical perspective, which emphasizes skills or strategies for learning that is unsupervised; the psychological one, being more about students' attitudes and cognitive abilities; and finally, the political perspective, which refers to the empowerment given to learners in order for them to take control of their learning.

Hence, Little and Holec are the ones whose definitions fit the best on this research due to the characteristics they attribute to autonomy, and also, because no matter if it is an ability or a capacity, in the end the process students go through, is the same in both cases. This makes clear that autonomy does not mean letting the students do whatever they want, but instead, it functions as a controlled process to empower learners. But why is it a good idea to base an entire research project on autonomy? According to Benson (2013), the concept of autonomy is now part of the conventional research topics within the field of language education, due to the success of a big quantity of projects that have been related to autonomy.

Furthermore, according to Benson (2013), one of the principal characteristics of research on autonomy in language learning is that it pretends to look for resources that go beyond the field of language and that are capable of providing students with both insights, and intellectual guidance. Most of the times this is something students miss, because there is an infinite number of tools, but it can be difficult for them to recognize each, and even more, to get to learn how to use said tools on their own.

As important as it is to define autonomy, it is also important to go beyond and analyze some other aspects that turn to be relevant for the concept itself. One of those aspects will be how to measure autonomy, or the extent to which learners are autonomous. Autonomy should not be considered as an ‘all- or- nothing concept’, but either as a matter of degree; there are plenty of examples of writers who refer to learners ‘becoming more autonomous’, this last being an example of how it is possible for autonomy to extend to a certain degree, of how it can be measured (Benson, 2013).

Subsequently, together with autonomy it comes autonomous learning, which Crome et al. (as cited in Hay and Mathers, 2012) describe as an ability to self-manage study and learning, and to

notice which are one's strengths and weaknesses as a learner. Similarly, Littlewood (1999) defines autonomous learning as a process that involves students' capacity to get to use their learning and be independent of teachers. However, Shen (1994) does not emphasize the same aspects; he states that autonomous learning is about interacting with the environment and has its own actions and perceptions; such definition is distant from the two previous definitions.

As a result of the previous comparison of perspectives, it is possible for me to say that autonomous learning is certainly a process, and as a process it deals with certain characteristics and steps to follow in order for a learner to become autonomous. Certainly, for this to occur students need to become independent and learn to self- manage what they study in order to reach their learning objectives, as well as to assume their strengths and weaknesses in order to create techniques that will allow them to do so.

Truth is, that in order to take control of their own learning, learners should be trained in order to get to understand how to do so. But, to provide learner training in the classroom is very demanding, especially when learners do not appreciate the value of it and the teacher becomes unpopular, his intentions are classified as wasting time, instead of teaching. A possible solution to this problem is for the teacher to create learning tasks that are purposeful, so students can come to regard learning how to learn as something valuable.

As important as it is to define autonomy, and autonomous learning, it is also important to go beyond and analyze some other aspects that turn out to be relevant for the concept itself. One of those aspects will be how to measure autonomy, or the extent to which learners are autonomous. Autonomy should not be considered as an 'all- or- nothing concept', but either as a matter of degree; there are plenty of examples of writers who refer to learners 'becoming more autonomous', this last being an example of how it is possible for autonomy to extend to a certain

degree, of how it can be measured. In the case of autonomy, it is hard to give learners a test. The essence of autonomous behavior is that it is self-initiated and not generated in response to a task (Benson, 2013).

Additionally, another concept that comes handy in this section is language learning, so we can then focus on autonomous language learning. Assuming that language learning is a process by which people learn a language different to their mother tongue and get to be proficient in said language may probably sound redundant, quite simple and repetitive. Hence, Yule (2010) describes language learning as a process of accumulating knowledge of different linguistic features, such as vocabulary and grammar (it usually takes place in an institution). Furthermore, Halliday (1993) states that this process is semiotic, and learning a language is the equivalent to expanding one's meaning potential.

Indeed, all the three authors together have made a very good point on what language learning is about. It is a process (the same way autonomous learning is), and students' goal is to be proficient in the language they are learning. As a process it encompasses different stages, and it is true that all the features are equally important (though this research emphasizes the oral skill), vocabulary, grammar, listening, reading, writing and speaking come together as a whole to help make someone proficient in a language (in this case in English).

It is equally important to consider that this paper emphasizes English as a foreign language (EFL). Which Thornbury (2006) defines as English taught to learners that live in a community where English is not the usual language they use to communicate with the others. In the same way Kramer & Catalano (2015) agree with Thornbury, saying that EFL is the learning of a nonnative language that takes place outside of its environment. Whereas Eddy on his 2011 study (as cited in Kramer and Catalano, 2015) adds something more which is pretty important, that this

language is voluntarily chosen, and this choice is usually influenced by people's interests and their plans for the future. With this information I can assure that learning a foreign language is a matter of choice.

1.2 Communicative language teaching

In the same way that language learning is an important concept, it is impossible to leave language teaching out of the discussion. According to Kramer & Catalano (2015), foreign language teaching refers to the teaching of a nonnative language in an environment different from the one where the language is spoken. Richards & Rodgers (1986) add further to this definition by assuring that there has been a change of the language teaching methods and this change goes along with the kind of proficiency needed by learners, for example, moving towards the oral proficiency, instead of reading comprehension, and so on.

The two definitions mentioned in the previous paragraph complement one another. Richards & Rodgers' affirmation on how teaching methods have renewed according to the learners' needs is the most relevant issue. This is one of the main reasons the current research project came to life, by observing that the majority of students wanted to communicate and that they were not proficient English speakers at the end of their English course.

According to Basta, (2011) the Communicative Language Teaching approach has its origins in Great Britain in the 1960's. It began when applied linguists began to question the Situational Language Teaching approach. In this area, Chomsky was among the first people to demonstrate that structural theories of language could not provide creativity and uniqueness of single sentences. Richards (2006) adds that this approach can be understood as a set of principles about the goals of language teaching. For me, both definitions are incomplete.

On the contrary, Littlewood (2013) has a more much wider definition. Littlewood explains that this communicative perspective is most about what we learn. Its main proposition is that students learn language functions instead of language structures. In this kind of courses, students practice expressing determined functions, for example, giving advice, or making suggestions, and later they use these in communicative activities, such a role-play in order to practice.

Some other relevant authors who talked about the communicative approach were: Wilkins in 1972 saying this approach had the main characteristic of being functional; Firth in 1950 who recommended to consider a broader sociocultural context when working with the communicative approach. Also, some other theorists as Canale and Swain in 1980, Widdowson in 1989, and Halliday in 1970, stressed the important of this approach. The communicative acts which underlie the ability to use language for different purposes, were the ones they particularly considered the most important (Basta, 2011).

Since the Communicative Approach came out after the Audio-Lingual Method, it is logical for it to prioritize meaning. This implies that the semantic content comes first, while the other aspects of language come second. This approach has as its main idea, that students learn and acquire grammar through meaning. Therefore, it is recommended for the teacher to provide activities to make learners use language meaningfully and authentically (Basta, 2011).

1.3 The oral language skills

Moreover, if the research is based on the oral or speaking skills, it is a must to review this concept as well. Speaking is defined by Fattah (2006), as the production of auditory signals which are designed to produce different responses in a listener. It is a combination of sounds in a systematic way. Differently, Eckard & Kearny (1981) stablish that speaking is mainly a two-way

process and the most important characteristic is that it involves true communication of information, ideas, and lots of other different things.

The previous definitions lack of something, which I think Burns (1998) covers on his. Burns defines speaking mostly as an interactive process (interaction is fundamental in this case) of constructing meaning. For Burns, it is a sequence of steps; first producing, then receiving, and finally processing information. For me this, is the most complete definition, as all along the project interaction is specially emphasized; and also, speaking will not be complete without reaching its ultimate goal, which is transmitting a message (that the receptor gets when he or she is capable of processing information).

Eventually, when time to speak comes, speaker and listener need to be good at processing the spoken word, and able to produce appropriate utterances depending on the communicative circumstance they face. It is also helpful if both speakers are good at saying what they so the other person finds it understandable. Therefore, to get to know what the process itself involves, it is useful to think of the communication of meaning as depending on two kinds of skill (Bygate, 1987).

Bygate (1987), also states that it is necessary for teachers to know about management of interaction. This kind of management groups together a kind of freedom participants have, which is useful to distinguish a conversation from a meeting or a lecture. In here, both participants can intervene as and when they wish. Interaction management has at least two aspects, which are: agenda management, and turn-taking. The first aspect refers basically to control over the content (choosing a topic for the interaction) and turn-taking relates to the aspect of who speaks when and for how long.

To this point, the major aspects of oral language skills have been discussed. Bygate (1987), shares Littlewood's view, who provides a framework to define oral exercises; he suggests four major kinds of language-learning exercise, two major branches: pre-communicative activities (which encompass structural activities, and quasi-communicative activities), and communicative activities (including functional communication activities, and social interaction activities). The main distinction between the two kinds of activities is that the first ones are preparatory activities, intended to prepare learners for the second type of task in which they are required to communicate.

The two main categories are sub-divided. The first type of pre-communicative activity is about structural exercises, it focuses on the grammatical system and different ways in which linguistic items can be combined. On the other hand, quasi-communicative activities consist of more typical conversational exchanges, like drills and dialogues. About the second major type of activities, there are also two kinds: the functional communication activities and social interaction activities (Bygate, 1987).

A way to measure students' success is by checking if they can deal with the communicative demands of the situation they face. On the other hand, social interaction activities involve taking advantage of stimulation and role-playing; these kinds of activities create a variety of social situations that are likely to naturally occur. In here, success can be measured in terms of how acceptable the language forms students use, are (Bygate, 1987).

For Littlewood (2007), the usefulness of language depends more on the learner mastering the general principles underlying those parts of language. This is because language structures and communicative functions are not tied to specific situations once they are mastered, so people can

use each of them creatively and transfer said structures to lots of different contexts, not just the one where those were initially acquired.

This last being a comparison of how human beings acquire the basic communication skills in their mother tongue (in a family context), and later they can transfer those skills to a wider range of social situations. In the same way, the structures and skills a learner acquires when he or she interacts in the classroom, can be transferred to other kinds of situation (Littlewood, 2007).

Probably this is something that, as teachers it is possible to perceive, but that students cannot easily understand. Therefore, it will be a good idea to make them conscious of that fact, because textbooks tend to be full of information that some students try to memorize (all of it) without even realizing that many of those things are the same, just seen from a different perspective or in a different context, and, that they can use the same language for lots of different situations.

As a matter of fact, it is also important to go into the field of both competence and performance, for the purposes of this research paper. According to Reishaan & Taha (2018), competence means the person's knowledge of his language. This is the set of rules we master throughout our lives, for us to be possible to produce and understand an infinite number of sentences. While performance is the language as a set of utterances that native speakers produce. Additionally, Williamson (as cited in Reishaan and Taha, 2018), has a very similar perspective, and a very important point, which is that, the competence in the use of language is what makes possible a speaker's performance.

On the other hand, in 1972 Hymes continued to work with the notions of "competence" and "performance" that had been introduced by Chomsky in the 1960's. He stated that the main goal of language teaching was developing "communicative competence", that implied acquiring an ability, as well as knowledge, to use language. In plain words, in the branch of communicative

competence, language is considered as a tool that is used for communication. Communicative competence aims to focus on the development of the four language skills, but it depends, as well, on the correlation between the skills (Basta, 2011).

It is true that performance goes along with competence, or at least it seems to. The two definitions previously established seem to agree on that matter. In some cases, students' performance does not match their competence, and though this may seem out of place, Canale and Swain (1980) are very precise when they say competence is the person's knowledge of language, while performance is the use of that language in concrete situations. Personally, I agree with them, performance does not only imply using language, but having the capacity to use it correctly depending on the situation.

Basta (2011), provides her own interpretation of these communicative competences, and it is very complete. Firstly, linguistic or grammatical competence is a set of grammatical rules that guide sentence formation, but she states that some authors, like Canale and Swain find those rules as something useless, because language users are unaware of them. Secondly, according to Basta, four skills (reading, listening, writing, speaking), do not occur in isolation from reality, here where sociolinguistic competence comes out, to verify if the utterances that are produced can be understood in different sociolinguistic contexts.

As well, Hymes proposed a list of communicative competences, which encompassed the linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competence. In the same way Basta provided her own interpretation of these competences, being linguistic competence about the rules that guide sentence formation; pragmatic competence implying learners are engaged in coherent communication on various occasions; finally, discourse competence is concerned with the connections between a variety of discourses that then create a meaningful whole (Basta, 2011).

1.4 Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL)

From varied definitions, it is possible to say that mobile learning exists when an interactive learning environment is created, in multiple contexts and using different kinds of applications that are available in the mobile. In the last years, smartphones came in hand for all people and caused many changes, people started keeping track of their health, news, economics, and friends, among others. Keeping devices away from education nowadays seems to be difficult, so it will be a good idea to use them for the benefit of both, students and teachers.

Czerska (as cited in Mosavi and Nezarat, 2012) describes MALL as the use of mobile technology in language learning. With the use of this technology students do not need to be in a classroom, so it can be considered as a solution to language learning issues talking about time and place. An addition to this definition are the main characteristics of this technology. Mosavi & Nezarat (2012) establish that it is personalized, spontaneous, and informal. A great advantage is that it provides learners with a greater sense of freedom of time and place, in this way it is possible for them to take advantage of their spare time.

As the purpose of this research project is for students to be able to practice oral activities autonomously, in order to enhance their oral production in the classroom. Then, mobile-assisted language learning comes as a handy tool in this case; nowadays technological advancement continues to grow, people (in general, not just students) spend lots of time on their cell phones using applications that provide them opportunities to communicate and interact with others (mostly). Therefore, the cell phone may end up being a potential tool in this case.

For instance, Lyddon (2016) relates mobile devices with autonomy, she argues that nowadays many Internet-capable mobile devices have brought a wide range of possibilities, they provide

the opportunity to learn anytime and anywhere, with lots of content available. Even with all of these advantages, it is true that technology by itself is not sufficient, learners also need to have the ability to use it. On the other hand, Mosavi (2012) states that mobile learning can be considered as the next generation of e-learning. He argues that mobile devices do not have to be a substitute for actual learning devices, on the contrary, these should be used as an additional tool to learn in a new environment and acquire new abilities. MALL has the potential to make learning spontaneous, informal, and personalized.

Finally, some of the advantages of mobile learning are: the learner controlling the learning process and progressing in his/her own space. Students learning in a non-classroom environment, which is a major advantage, because, as it has been previously mentioned, students are able to learn at anytime and anyplace they are. Students can take their devices to different places, exchange data and collaborate with other former students, and even store their activities on a platform (Mosavi, 2012).

As a conclusion after analyzing some of the most relevant theoretical concepts for the research, it is important to mention that the theoretical framework is based on four basic premises, which are: autonomy in language learning, communicative language teaching, the oral language skills, and, last but not least, mobile-assisted language learning. Each one still encompassed by some other concepts. All these relevant for the current research.

Methodology

The third chapter of this paper emphasizes the importance of action research, which is the kind of methodology that will be used in order to complete this research. According to the findings action research represents a process of inquiry, conducted by the person (in this case a

teacher) who decides to act in order to improve a situation that seems problematic in a teaching area. It is not certain to say that there a solution will exist with the use of action research, but instead the situation will be more manageable (Elliott, 1991).

From the different action research models that exist, the one taken into consideration for this study will be Elliott's model. Elliott (1991) argues that once there is a general idea, this one should be allowed to change. He emphasizes the concept of reconnaissance that should include analysis and fact finding and occur throughout the action research process and not only in the beginning stage. His ideas are relevant to this project, the general idea of it has certainly changed all along the research. About the fact finding, it is also true that different asseverations have been done and then done again.

In this part the first thing to do was to establish the context. A private school that offers English classes for different levels and to a wide range of students. Secondly, one of the many programs that the school contributes with was chosen. This program offers English classes on Saturdays. Students in the program are young adults and they take three and a half hours of English per week. A group was chosen as well, and observations done, in both schedules (morning and afternoon) considering the same level.

The population consists of students that belong to the English program where the problem was detected at first. There were forty students taken into account, all of them among 18 and 30 years old. Two groups were considered (same level in different schedules, morning and afternoon). One of these was the experimental group, while the other one was the control group, both groups answered a confidence in speaking questionnaire at the beginning of the course. This questionnaire allowed the researcher to find out how confident students were at speaking English at the beginning of the course. In the same way, both groups completed a needs analysis. This

needs analysis was meant to find out the kind of needs students had in learning, as well as the activities they preferred. In the end, the resultant set of activities to improve oral proficiency will be applied just to one group.

The confidence in speaking questionnaire adapted from Rahmani, 2014 (See annex 1). (It is important to mention that the author gave authorization for the questionnaire to be adapted) was applied first. The second instrument was a sample of needs analysis questionnaire, also adapted from Rahmani, 2014 (See annex 2). As this project deals with the enhancement of the oral skill, first, it is necessary to find out about the difficulties students may have in order to fully develop or become proficient in this skill. The action research conducted by Vahid Rahmani emphasizes the idea that increasing students' confidence will make them participate more actively in classroom oral activities.

In this case, the main problem is the class schedule students have (three and a half hours, once a week); besides there is a lack of didactic activities adapted to the time in class and oriented to develop the oral skill. Therefore, both questionnaires will be helpful in order to find out which are the aspects that prevent students from enhancing their oral skills, and the way they would like to practice in order to enhance them. The confidence in speaking questionnaire consists of a series of statements that students will read carefully in order to select the criteria that best fits them, the needs analysis allows students to share their opinions about different ways in which they like to learn.

In the adapted version of the confidence in speaking questionnaire, each statement has been planned for students to give evidence of the things that are more difficult for them (to get to develop their speaking skills). Not practicing often and considering speaking a difficult skill to acquire are some examples. As well as students who dislike speaking and avoid discussing with

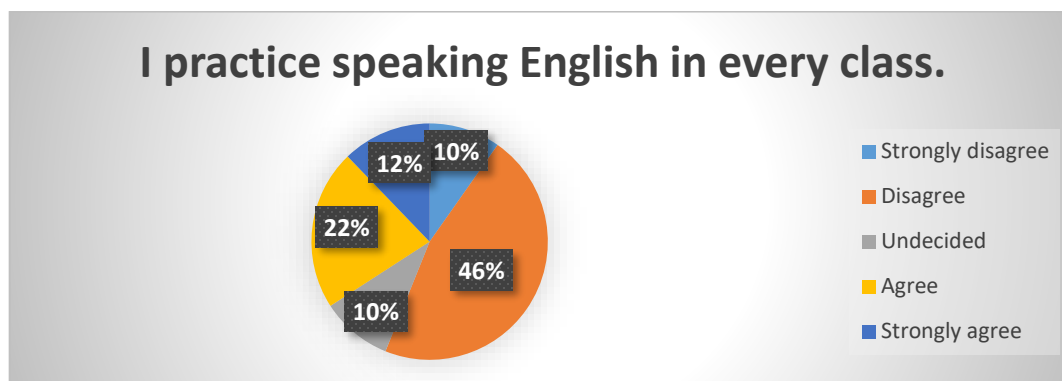
their classmates when it is time to do it, or some that may consider they do not have enough time to practice in class and do not look for more opportunities to practice afterwards. While the sample of needs analysis questionnaire consists of statements that allow students to give evidence of their learning needs. In both, the answers collected will show the perception students have of the English courses.

In this case, due to the distance, data collection will be done using a platform called 'Typeform'. This platform allows participants to answer the questionnaire online. Once data collection is completed, there will be an examination of the results, this will be done by creating graphics, to be able to corroborate if there is a lack of oral production because of the reasons previously stated. The researcher will play an active role, there will be a chance to teach both groups in order to apply what will end up being the didactic proposal.

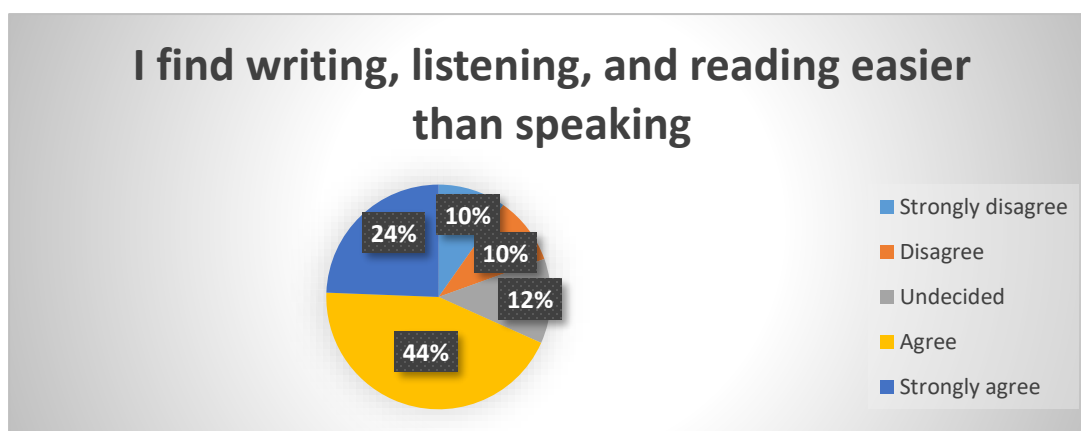
Results and analysis

Once both questionnaires were applied, it was possible to get some general conclusions that have to do with the hypotheses previously stated (mostly implicitly). Some of the results were as expected, on the other hand, some others were surprising, depending on the perspective, of course. It is important to mention that results will make it possible to create a didactic proposal that will be applied, and then some other findings will come out.

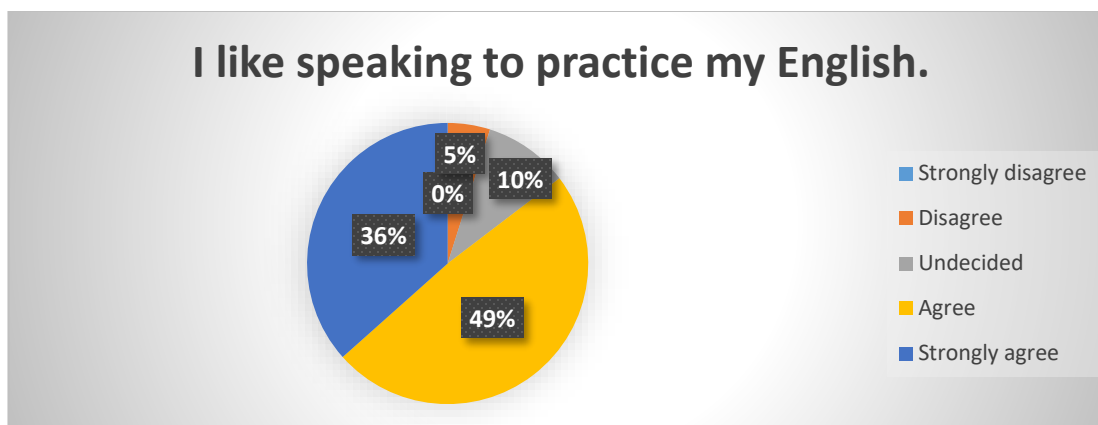
Confidence in speaking questionnaire results (Adapted from Rahmani, 2014)



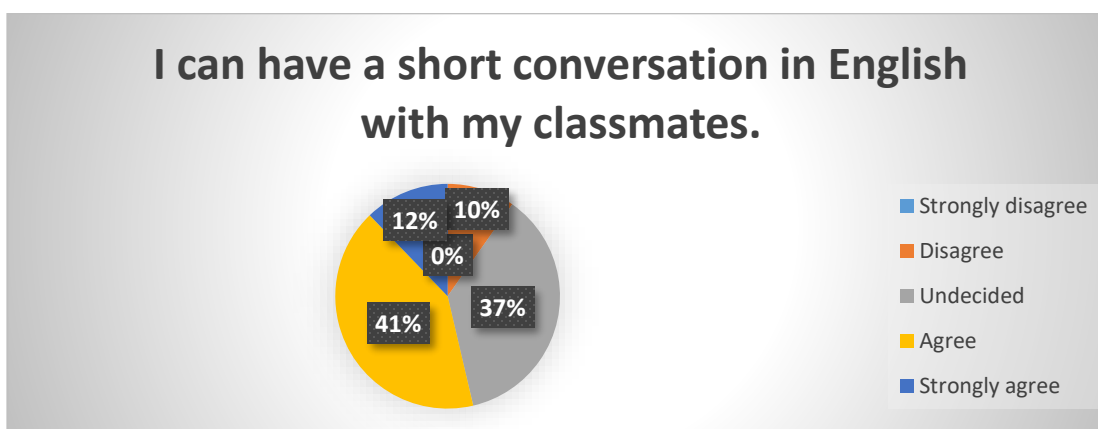
Statement 1: The first statement shows that most students do not practice speaking in English every class, which takes place just once a week for a period of three and a half hours. Then, if they do not practice speaking during the class, it does not seem feasible for them to get another chance later on during the week. This, meaning the ability is not being enhanced at all.



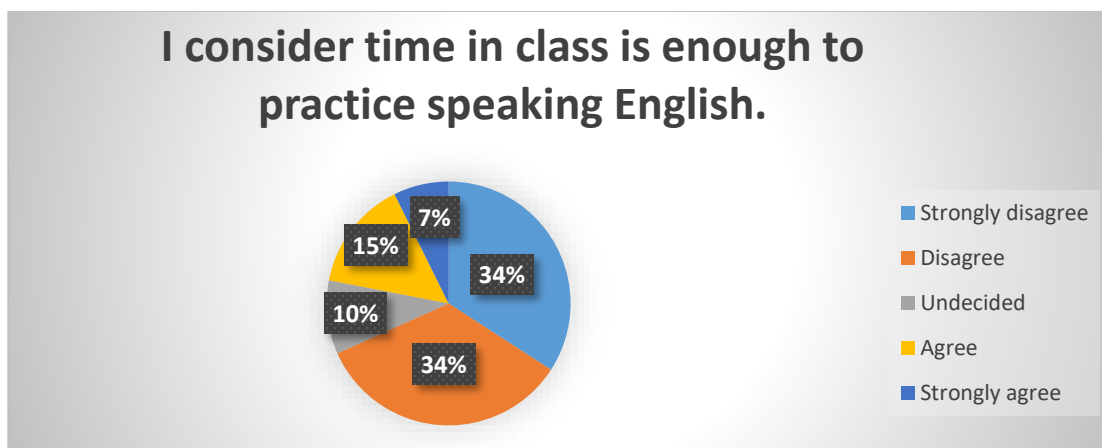
Statement 2: In this second statement, it is possible to observe that most of the students find the rest of the skills to be easier than speaking. Which gives a clue on the skill they also need to practice the most. It is also important to consider the rest of the population (people who disagree). And it is more than clear that the four skills require special attention; still, there must definitely be an emphasis on speaking.



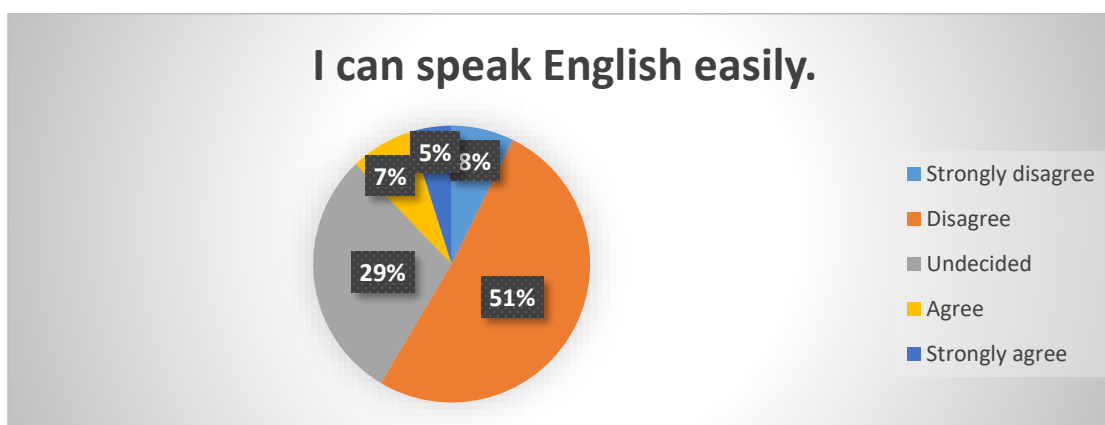
Statement 3: In the third statement, students confirm that they like speaking in order to get to practice the target language. Though, this does not mean it will be the only alternative the teacher will use, but in a way, it reinforces what the project intends to do. If students do like speaking it will be easier to enhance the skill.



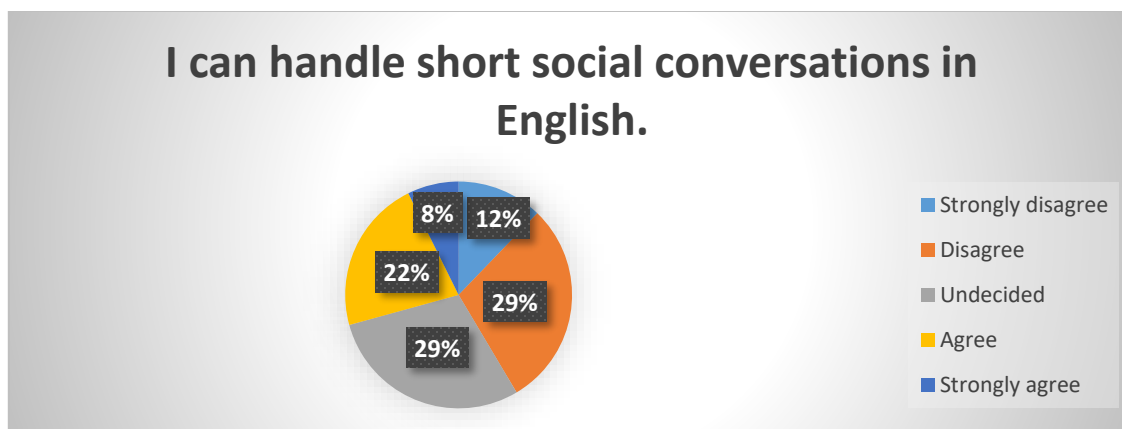
Statement 4: According to the Common European Framework of Reference, students who are in this proficiency level can have short conversations. The majority (53%) agrees on this matter, and state that, in fact, they can have a short conversation in English. Despite this, a 37% which is not a small percentage, is still undecided and cannot decide whether they can do it or not.



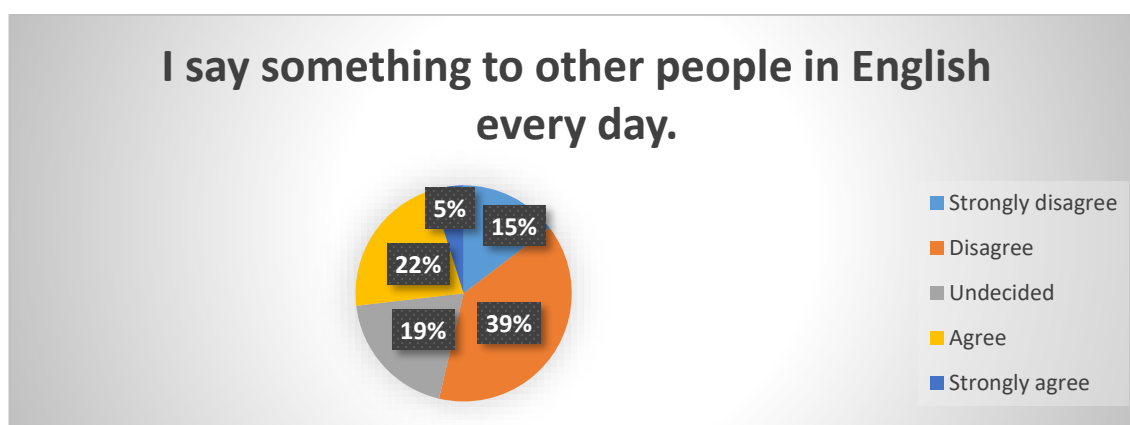
Statement 5: This statement is very important, as it confirms one of the hypotheses that were established in the beginning. The time in class does not seem enough to practice speaking. The biggest percentage (68%) does not consider they have got enough time. Just a minimum number of students believe that it is enough, at least for them.



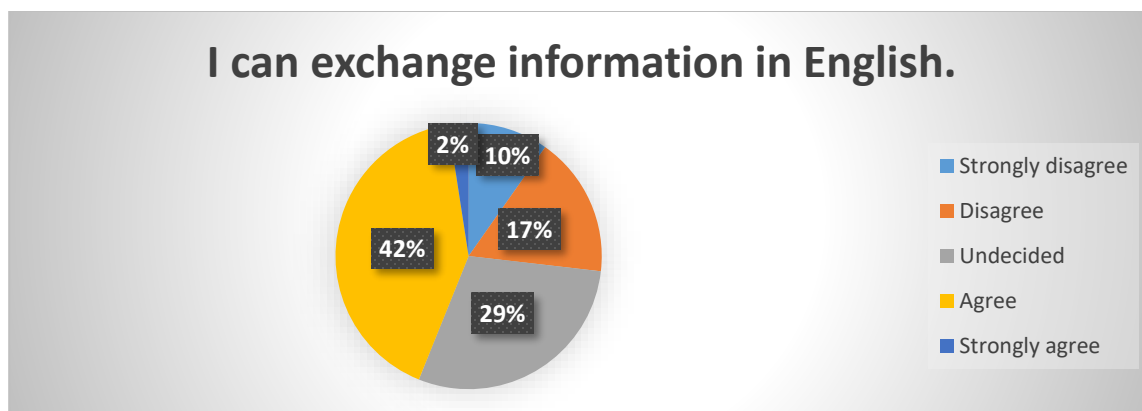
Statement 6: In this statement it is possible to figure out how difficult it seems for students to speak in English. Most of them (59%) deny the fact of being able to speak the language easily. Among the rest of them there is also a big percentage (29%) that states not being sure if they can do it(undecided). Again, just a very small percentage (12%) are the ones who agree.



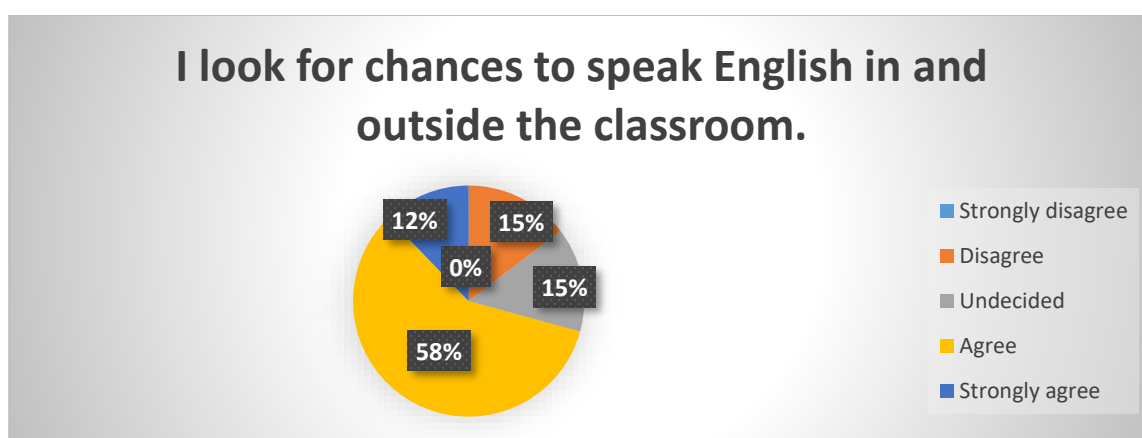
Statement 7: On the other hand, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, having a short social conversation is one of the oral skills students have in this level. But results show that most of the students, either disagree, strongly disagree, or feel undecided (not sure if they can do it or not). Again, a 30% of the students say they are able to do so. Which implies something that probably happens in every classroom: proficiency is different on each student.



Statement 8: With this statement, the point is to corroborate how many students practice English on a daily basis by talking to other people. Over here, once again the majority disagrees (54%). The ones that are undecided are probably trying to state that they do it sometimes, and the rest may be students who are currently working on a place where English is required, and they must use it for that matter.



Statement 9: Similar to some previous statements, this is another statement that tries to corroborate if students have already acquired an oral skill that they are supposed to have according to their proficiency level. At first sight, apparently most of them agree, but it is important to consider that this percentage (44%) is still in contrast with the ones who are either undecided or disagree (56%) which is a bigger percentage.



Statement 10: This statement tries to emphasize students' needs. Most of them, a 70% to be precise, clearly look for opportunities to be able to speak English, no matter if it is inside or outside the classroom. Therefore, it is important to try to accomplish this goal of being able to provide them with said opportunities.

I can use a series of phrases and sentences in English.



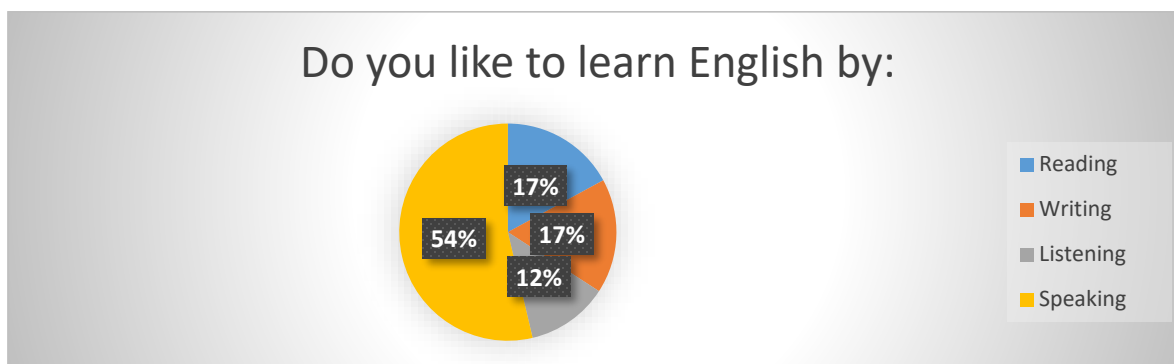
Statement 11: Using a series of phrases and sentences in English is one of the basic skills students get to familiarize with once they start any course. Not only orally, but also when they write, read, and listen. Therefore, most of them agree or strongly agree with this statement and say it is possible for them to do so.

I am relaxed when speaking English.

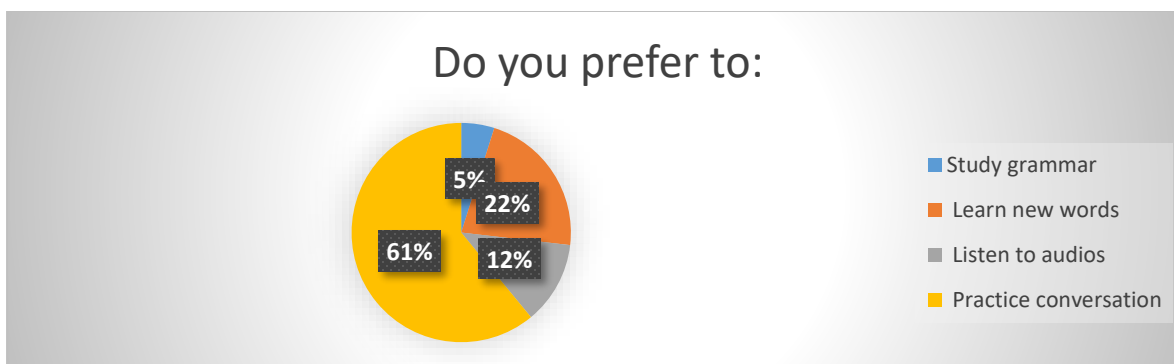


Statement 12: Finally, with this last statement in the Confidence in Speaking questionnaire, the point is to find out how students feel when they must speak English. According to the answers 64% of the students are not relaxed when it is time to speak. Which is reasonable to an extent, but it is not exactly the point. More practice implies more confidence.

A Sample of Needs Analysis Questionnaire results (Adapted from Rahmani, 2014)



Question 1: In the first question students had to say which of the four skills they like better in order to learn English. The majority states that they prefer speaking. Which does not mean the rest of the skills will be left out, as they are equally important, but reinforces the idea of incorporating more speaking activities.



Question 2: The second question deals with the kind of activity students prefer. Most of them decided they would rather practice conversation instead of other activities (which sometimes seem to be more conventional), like studying the grammar of the language, or listening to audios. It is important to mention that this kind of activities are also important for the development of the rest of the skills, but once again it is recommended to focus on speaking.

The best way for me to learn English is by:



Question 3: This is a key statement for the didactic proposal. As it was previously mentioned, the idea is to use MALL (Mobile-Assisted Language Learning), so that students can get extra speaking practice during the week. By seeing the results, a high percentage (44%) prefers to use electronic devices in order to get to learn English. On the other hand, the second highest percentage (19%) would rather learn by playing games, an alternative that is also feasible to carry out by using electronic devices.

Do you like to learn by talking to friends in English?



Question 4: With this question, it is possible to realize that students do like to speak. Talking to friends in English is one of the most common ways to get to learn the language without feeling concerned about the mistakes made. This is because, normally, a peer or a friend has the same proficiency level, and both can learn based on self-correction.

Do you like to learn English words by:



Question 5: This statement is also useful, as it confirms (once again) that students prefer to practice what they already know (or will learn), instead of just visualizing content. There are different ways to do this, teachers can also provide this practice by having students to use these words in sentences or to identify them on a text. But it is also true that speaking is another alternative for them to use the vocabulary they are meant to learn.

Do you like to learn English with a group?



Question 6: Most of the students like to learn English with a group. So, it will be a good idea to implement activities during the class that allow for group interaction, even when time is limited. This does not mean that practicing outside the classroom will stop being an alternative. Group speaking activities will allow students (in a way) to be able to apply what they have learned during the week.

Do you like to learn English by interacting?

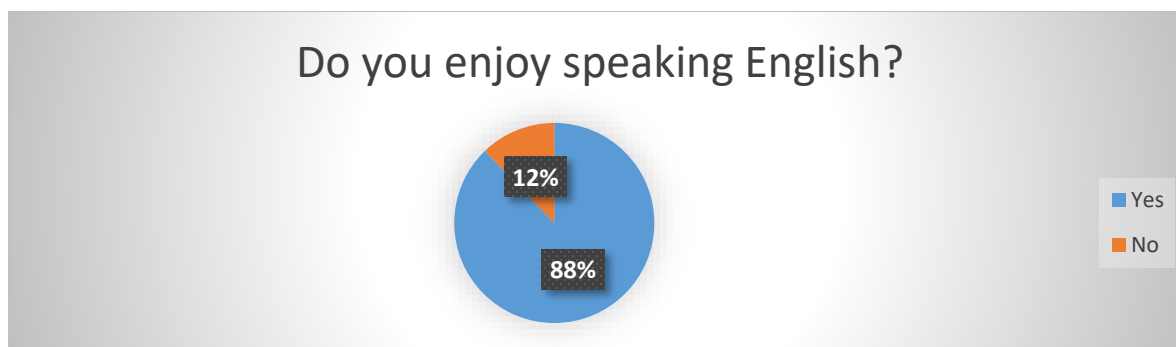


Question 7: As well as most of the students like to learn English with a group, most of them also like to interact. This is completely understandable, as the most common way to learn a language is through interaction, either with a teacher or with the rest of the group (if the class is not taken individually). Something interesting to mention is that it is also possible for students to interact once they get to use their mobile devices to learn (depending on the kind of apps they will be using).

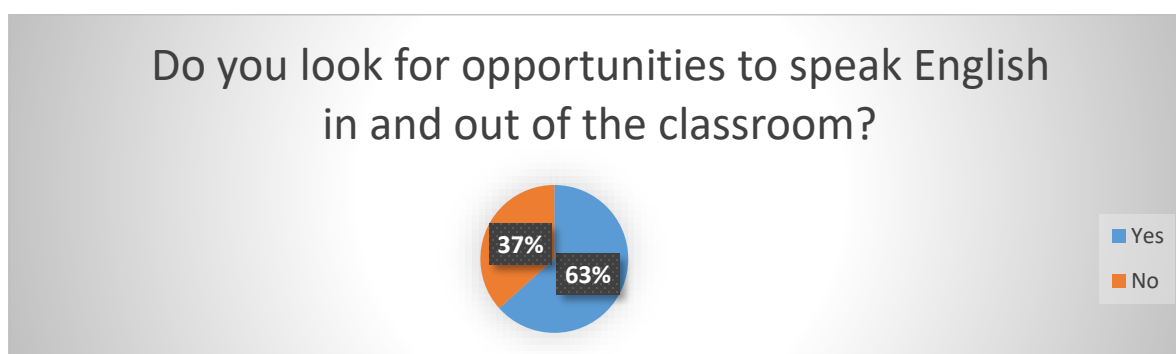
How often do you speak English outside the classroom?



Question 8: Once again, it is possible to confirm that most of the students do not have a chance to speak English when they are outside the classroom. This means they only get to practice once a week (if they do). A 71% says they rarely or never do it, while only 29% states that they do it often. Here the theory is the same that was presented before, some students probably work in a place where they need to use English for their daily tasks. Still, it is a minority.

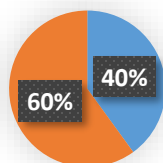


Question 9: This question is also relevant, as it is possible to realize that most of the students enjoy speaking English. Which is an advantage, because the biggest amount (88%) will be willing to participate in activities that imply speaking without any problem. On the other hand, (something that has already been mentioned too) it is a must for teachers to provide a variety of activities so that the whole group can feel comfortable. This for the ones who do not enjoy speaking that much.



Question 10: Here it is possible to corroborate (once again) that most of the students look for chances to get to speak English, either in or out of the classroom. Despite this, there is still a 37% which is not precisely small that does not look for said opportunities, probably because their focus is not mainly on speaking. That does not represent a problem, as their needs can be addressed as well.

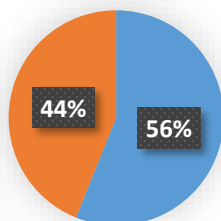
Do you have enough confidence to have short conversations in English?



■ Yes
■ No

Question 11: This is a question was previously asked in the Confidence in Speaking Questionnaire. The difference is that in the previous questionnaire, this statement made an emphasis on having short conversations with a partner. This one is different, and more general to an extent, therefore most of the students said they do not feel confident enough. Probably because they can have a short conversation on a controlled environment with someone that has their same proficiency level, but once they are out of the classroom it becomes more difficult.

How do you prefer to practice English?



■ Outside the class
■ In class

Question 12: This question is relevant for the didactic proposal. As the use of MALL has been thought to be done outside the classroom, and it is possible to observe most students state they would rather practice outside the class. It is true that there is also a big percentage (44%) that prefers to practice in class, which is not something bad. There will be extra activities, as well as a focus on speaking inside of the classroom.

How do you learn better?



Question 13: It is also important to realize that, even when most of the students express that they learn better working by themselves, the other half learns better either with a partner or working in teams. Which is also something that needs to be taken into consideration when planning for those extra activities to enhance the oral skills.

Which is the skill you wish to improve the most?



Question 14: Finally, it is also important to realize that students' cooperation will not be a problem, because they emphasize their interest to enhance/ improve speaking, more than they wish to improve any other skill. It is relevant to mention one last time, this does not mean the other skills will be left out, all of them will still be equally important. But the numbers allow to realize that students want to be able to communicate by improving their speaking skills.

After analyzing the previous results, it is possible to observe that the didactic proposal can be oriented in the way it was actually meant to. Students have expressed their opinion on the use of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning as something that calls their attention. They have also showed their interest in practicing and enhancing the oral skills in and out of the classroom.

Therefore, the idea will continue to be the same. Students will use technology to promote their oral production. The didactic proposal is shown as it follows.

Didactic proposal's implementation

Title	Getting to speak English with the use of technology (Whatsapp)
Presentation	<p>This didactic proposal is meant to help young adult EFL learners who are part of a governmental program where classes last three and a half hours and take place only on Saturdays. The issue is that these students do not get enough practice and they cannot fully develop their oral skills at the end of each level.</p> <p>It was decided to use Mobile-Assisted Language Learning as a strategy to help students overcome the problem. In this case technology will play a very important role because students will be working with their cell phones. From the many apps available it was decided to use Whatsapp as it is free and students now how to handle it.</p> <p>Along the course (Level 2) students will be part of a Whatsapp group created by the teacher. They will be using the group in order to perform different types of oral activities that will cover up the contents of the course and help students feel more confident and get more practice in order to enhance their oral skills.</p>
Objectives	<p>For students' to be able to enhance their oral skills with the use of technology.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students will be able to review the units' content with the use of technology. 2. Students will be able to improve their oral skills by practicing more often than they usually do.

Content	<p>Unit 1 Everyday life</p> <p>Objective: Students will be able to manage the present simple tense in order to talk about their lives.</p> <p>Unit 2 Places</p> <p>Objective: Students will be able to manage describing different places.</p> <p>Unit 3 Food</p> <p>Objective: Students will be able to manage talking about food.</p>
Theoretical framework	<p>Since the Communicative Approach came out after the Audio-Lingual Method, it is logical for it to prioritize meaning. This implies that the semantic content comes first, while the other aspects of language come second. This approach has as its main idea, that students learn and acquire grammar through meaning. Therefore, it is recommended for the teacher to provide activities to make learners use language meaningfully and authentically (Basta, 2011).</p> <p>Littlewood (2013) has a more much wider definition. Littlewood explains that this communicative perspective is most about what we learn. Its main proposition is that students learn language functions instead of language structures. In this kind of courses, students practice expressing determined functions, for example, giving advice, or making suggestions, and later they use these in communicative activities, such a role-play in order to practice.</p> <p>On the other hand, Richards (2006), establishes that the main goal of communicative language teaching is to teach communicative competence. In other words, students who are competent should be able to use the language for different purposes and functions and know how to vary the language according to the context or people involved. As well, they should be capable of knowing how to produce and understand</p>

	different types of texts, and how to maintain communication even if they have limitations on their knowledge.
Activities	<p>Unit 1 Everyday life</p> <p>Activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describing likes and dislikes Dynamic: Students will send an audio where they will describe three things they like and three things they dislike. 2. Describing daily routines, students' and someone else's. Dynamic: Students will send an audio describing three daily routines they have and three daily routines another person has. 3. Identifying the correct use of present simple. Dynamic: Students will answer an online exercise, then they will send a screen shot to the Whatsapp group in order to show how they did. <p>Unit 2 Places</p> <p>Activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Describing different rooms in the house by using there is/ there are and prepositions of place. Dynamic: Students will look at pictures of different rooms in the house. They will describe them orally. After that they will also write down a text and send it to the Whatsapp group attaching the picture they are describing with it. 5. Using object pronouns to express how students feel about different things/ people. Dynamic: Working in pairs students will ask each other questions. Ex. How do you feel about the president? And then answer using the object pronouns. Ex. I love him. They will record the audio and send it to the Whatsapp group. 6. Using the vocabulary learned along the unit to describe students' houses.

	<p>Dynamic: Students will prepare by writing down a text describing their houses. They will be required to send the text to the Whatsapp group and to memorize it. Next week students will go to the front and participate describing their houses for the rest of the group.</p> <p>Unit 3 Food</p> <p>Activities:</p> <p>7. Talking about eating habits considering countable and uncountable nouns.</p> <p>Dynamic: Working in teams students will draw a picture of a big table with a bunch of different food on it. They will take a picture of it to have as a reference. Students will send an audio talking about the food on the table.</p> <p>8. Role-play a conversation ordering food considering the use of some and any.</p> <p>Dynamic: In class students will participate in teams role-playing a conversation where they are on a restaurant ordering food. They will be recorded by the teacher. Audios will be sent to the Whatsapp group and students will analyze and mention their mistakes.</p> <p>9. Interview another person asking questions with how much and how many that deal with students' eating habits.</p> <p>Dynamic: Students must look for a person who speaks English outside the class. They will interview this person and ask questions such as: How many glasses of milk do you drink in one week? They will record the conversation and send it to the Whatsapp group.</p>
Competences	<p>Unit 1 Everyday life</p> <p>Competences:</p>

	<p>SWBAT describe their likes and dislikes.</p> <p>SWBAT use the present simple tense to describe daily routines in first and third person singular.</p> <p>SWBAT identify the correct use of the present simple tense.</p> <p>Unit 2 Places</p> <p>Competences:</p> <p>SWBAT describe different rooms in the house.</p> <p>SWBAT use object pronouns to express how they feel about something/ someone.</p> <p>SWBAT describe their house.</p> <p>Unit 3 Food</p> <p>Competences:</p> <p>SWBAT distinguish between countable and uncountable nouns.</p> <p>SWBAT use some and any to order food at a restaurant.</p> <p>SWBAT distinguish between how much and how many to ask questions.</p>
Evaluation	<p>In order to evaluate the results of this proposal a sample of students will be selected to be interviewed by the teacher. The questions will be elaborated based on the questionnaire which was applied before implementing the proposal. Questions will be asked in Spanish (as students are on level 2 and they are not capable of answering very complex questions yet).</p>

Didactic proposal's results

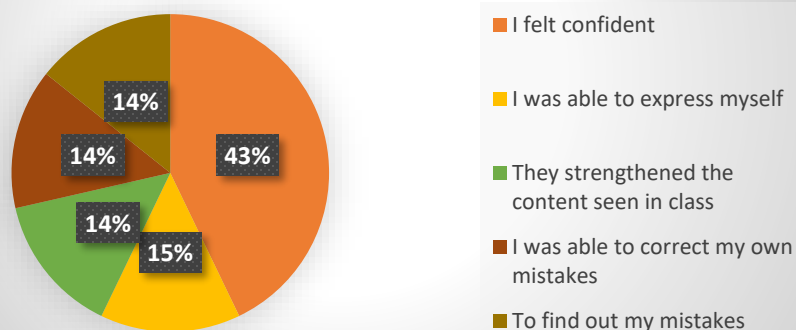
Once the activities included in the proposal took place and the level concluded, it was possible to observe that students improved. The atmosphere in the whole group was different, students used to participate more often and were not afraid to make mistakes. The original plan was to apply Rahmani's confident in speaking questionnaire again to evaluate the results, but this will not be

beneficial, as the information obtained will not truly reveal the actual change or benefits students got from the use of this strategy. Therefore, it was decided to interview a sample of students by asking them questions the interviewer elaborated based on the statements presented on Rahmani's questionnaire. The questions are listed above:

1. ¿Cómo sentiste que influyeron las actividades realizadas en el grupo de Whatsapp en tu nivel de confianza al hablar inglés?
2. ¿Te sentiste más motivado al aprender teniendo actividades extra fuera del salón de clases?
3. ¿Crees que las actividades y el grupo de Whatsapp te ayudaron a aprender de forma autónoma?
4. ¿Sientes que durante el nivel tuviste un mejor desempeño académico en la cuestión oral gracias a las actividades extra que se implementaron? ¿Por qué?
5. ¿Consideras que el uso de esta estrategia te benefició?
6. ¿Cuáles crees que son los principales beneficios que aporta a la mejora de tu habilidad oral?
7. ¿Cuáles consideras que son las desventajas del uso esta de esta aplicación como estrategia de aprendizaje?
8. ¿Qué cambiarías o agregarías para que fuese mejor?

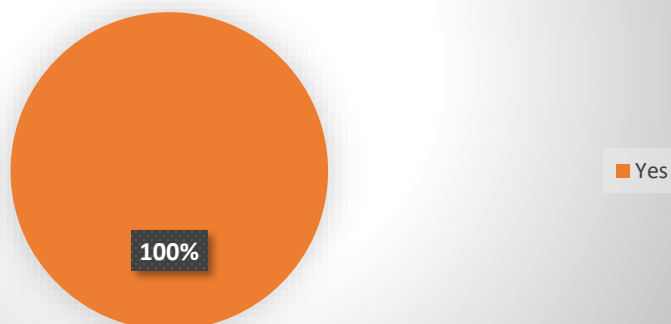
The reason questions were handled in Spanish is due to students' English level. As they were not able provide answers to questions with this level of complexity. The interview took place on the last day of classes and students showed themselves very positive about participating and talking about this learning strategy that was new for them. In the next section the graphics showing the results obtained will be displayed and analyzed.

How did you feel the activities on the Whatsapp group influenced your confidence when speaking English?



Question 1: For the first question answers were varied, as all of the students perceived there were different benefits. The most common answer had to do with confidence as the question was meant to. Students claimed they actually felt more confident. The second answer, being able to express is also a benefit one gets from gaining confidence in a foreign language. Another possible way of doing so is also by reviewing the contents a couple of times or having the ability to correct oneself and find out what you are doing wrong.

Did you feel more motivated having to learn with the use of extra activities out of the classroom?

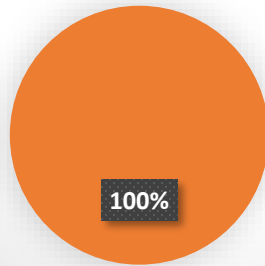


Question 2: For this question, the answer provided by all of the students that were interviewed was 'yes'. Not even a but to express. This is good because it means that having something to do besides going to class on Saturdays and sitting down for three and a half hours to learn English, is motivational. It makes students want to review more and probably to avoid missing the class as well.



Question 3: As in the previous question, all the answers were also 'yes'. Students admitted they had a schedule for doing the activities they had to carry out during the week. They will assign one day to review the content, another one to rehearse the audio they will record (looking for vocabulary and its pronunciation if they needed to), and sometimes one more to do so. Students were in the process of becoming autonomous learners.

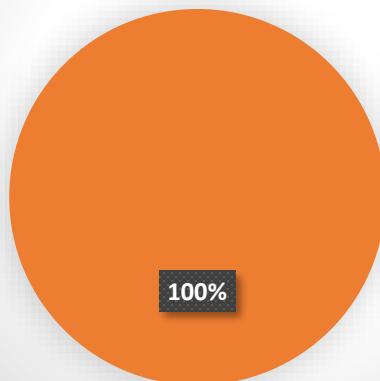
Do you feel like you had a better academic achievement in the oral aspect thanks to the activities that were implemented? Why?



Yes

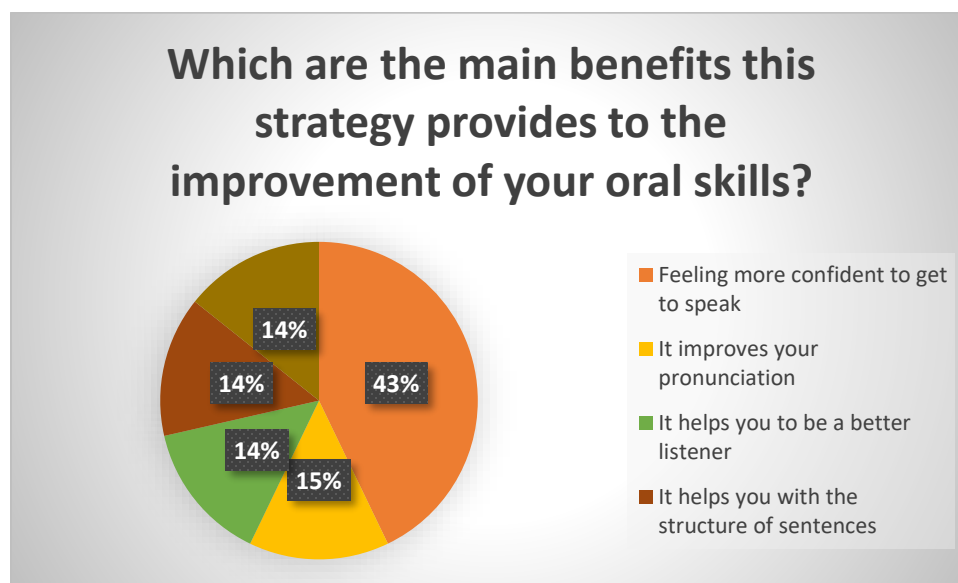
Question 4: Academic achievement was no exception. All of the students also felt they got better results with these extra activities. When they were asked of the reasons, students mentioned how they were not capable of expressing what they wanted or even what they were learning in class orally. But with this strategy they gained more knowledge and confidence to do so.

Do you consider the use of this strategy was beneficial for you?

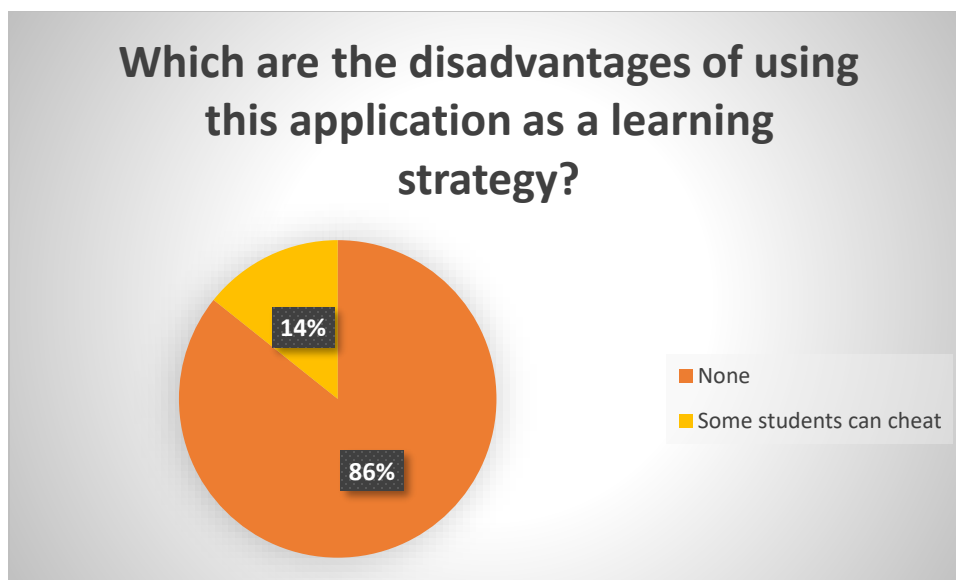


Yes

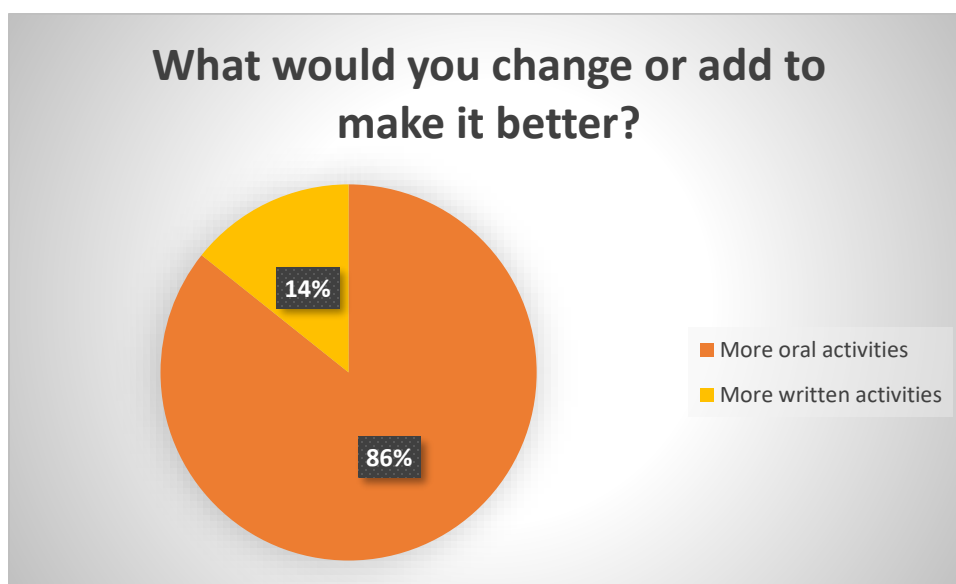
Question 5: Once again in question five all of the students gave affirmative answers. Due to the reasons previously established: having a better academic achievement, becoming more autonomous in the way and feeling more motivated to learn the contents. Besides, gaining confidence is also one of the most important benefits.



Question 6: This question plays a very important role on the interview. Students themselves had to share the perceived benefits this time. Surprisingly, once again confidence was the most recurrent answer. In second place it came pronunciation, which is associated with confidence because knowing how to pronounce a word sometimes is basic so that students feel good saying it. Some other perceived benefits were that the strategy helps you to be a better listener and with the structure and formulation of sentences.



Question 7: In this question most students said they perceived no disadvantages. Which, by the way, is a good sign. Just one of the students stated that it was possible to cheat; the student said this referring to the written texts and how some people can write everything in Spanish and then go and copy paste it on a translator to get their texts.



Question 8: The answers to this question were another good indicator. As this was a pilot group and they did not have a lot of vocabulary to work with (level 2), it was decided to carry

out one oral activity per week. The activity was sometimes performed in class and some others recorded and sent as an audio. Here, students established they would have liked to have more oral activities, some of them said a couple, some others said a daily activity will be fine. On the other hand, just one of the students expressed that more written activities would make the strategy better.

Didactic Proposal Conclusions and Findings

Through data analysis it is possible to find out that students are actually interested on learning outside the classroom. Most of them agree with the idea, due to the amount of time each class lasts it is not completely possible to enhance all of their skills. Therefore, as it was established by the researcher in the beginning, students also feel like they do not get to speak and promote oral skills as much as they would like. For this reason, extra activities for students to do outside the classroom are something positive and these also enhance their skills.

For the purposes of this research the choice was to use Whatsapp groups; this does not mean there is not a possibility to work with many other applications on the phone. Some of them, though being a little bit expensive provide much more benefits in the process of using them. Therefore, if this proposal is meant to be replicated on a school where there is a possibility to pay so that students will have a better education and get better results when completing an English course, it will be recommended to look for an app that will fit students' and teachers' needs.

General conclusions and recommendations

To start with, it is very important to mention that this project is a compilation of two years of work. It has changed back and forth in many aspects. The concept that existed in the beginning was something different, but the main idea of using technology remained the same. The results

were indeed very favorable. This resulted on a tool both for teachers and students. The next step right now could be to talk to the institution and look for a way to have all of the teachers who are part of the program try to implement the use of Whatsapp groups and check the results on a bigger scale.

Although some aspects of it may be perceived as disadvantages, it is for sure that the advantages overcome the disadvantages. Nowadays technology plays a fundamental role in people's lives, to say it does not will be a lie. Mobile phones have changed the way students learn and perceive the knowledge they receive from the teacher. These devices are even present on every class. Sometimes students get attached to their cell phones and get distracted. Therefore, it is a good idea to try to involve cell phones in the learning process as well.

About the learning strategy, it is true that mobile-assisted language learning provides students with an environment where they can do everything on their own pace. If the meaning of a word is unknown students get the chance to look for it on a dictionary and learn it, with no need of the teacher having to reveal what it means, which is more significant indeed. They can also reflect on their performance when answering grammatical exercises and find out how much they know or have learned about said topic. Even more important, they can evaluate themselves.

On the other hand, audios constitute a significant tool for students to enhance their language speaking (oral) proficiency. In this research it was possible to see that students were able to talk more and feel better about talking. Mobile- assisted language learning is also significant for teachers. If teachers listen to students' audios repeatedly, they will be able to find out what learners are doing wrong. In other words, they identify students' difficulties and get ready to provide feedback and work on the aspects that seem more difficult.

Another benefit is that the time restriction is gone. It is not only three-and a half hour anymore. Students can still practice during the week using their spare time to do so. Autonomy is developed as well, students become capable of working on their own, they set schedules to do it and rehearse the activity until they are ready to provide a final version of it with a better pronunciation, structure, cohesion and coherence. Plus, students get to notice the advantages by themselves, this way it is not necessary to force them to do it, they will do it willingly because it is something that will enhance their skills.

As well, it is important to mention that (as it was already established in the previous section) interviews with some of the students provided positive feedback only. Students said they had liked this way of learning so much, that it was something beneficial to develop their confidence, improve their pronunciation, work autonomously, and overcome the fear of speaking in public too. They even wanted to have more activities during the week, which means they were able to sacrifice more of their spare time to continue learning outside the classroom.

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Annex 1

The following questionnaire seeks to find out your opinion about the use of English as a foreign language in your daily life. The main purpose is to get to know how often you practice and how easy/difficult it is for you to communicate in English. The information you provide will be exclusively used for said purposes, and your personal information will be managed anonymously.

Confidence in Speaking Questionnaire (Adapted from Rahmani, 2014)

Level: _____ **Age:** _____ **Gender:** Male ☐ Female ☐

For each statement, choose the criteria that best describes your situation as an EFL student.

1. I practice speaking in English every class.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. I find writing, listening and reading easier than speaking.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. I like speaking to practice my English.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. I can have a short conversation in English with my classmates.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. I consider time in class is enough to practice speaking English.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. I can speak English easily.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. I can handle short social conversations in English.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. I say something to other people in English every day.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. I can exchange information in English.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. I look for chances to speak English in and outside the classroom.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

11. I can use a series of phrases and sentences in English.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

12. I am relaxed when speaking English.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

Annex 2

The following questionnaire seeks to find out your opinion about the use of English as a foreign language in your daily life. The main purpose is to get to know the means you like better in order to learn English. The information you provide will be exclusively used for said purposes, and your personal information will be managed anonymously.

A Sample of Needs Analysis Questionnaire

(Adapted from Rahmani, 2014)

Level: _____ **Age:** _____ **Gender:** Male ☐ Female ☐

For each statement, choose the option that best describes your situation as an EFL student.

1. Do you like to learn English by:

- ☐ Reading
- ☐ Writing
- ☐ Listening
- ☐ Speaking

2. Do you prefer to:

- ☐ Study grammar
- ☐ Learn new words
- ☐ Listen to audios
- ☐ Practice conversation

3. The best way for me to learn English is by:

- ☐ Playing games
- ☐ Having a conversation
- ☐ Reading books
- ☐ Watching series/movies
- ☐ Using electronic devices

4. Do you like to learn by talking to friends in English? ☐ Yes ☐ No

5. Do you like to learn English words by: ☐ Seeing them ☐ Using them

6. Do you like to learn English with a group? ☐ Yes ☐ No

7. Do you like to learn English by interacting? ☐ Yes ☐ No

8. How often do you speak English outside the classroom?

☐ Very often

☐ Often

☐ Rarely

☐ Never

9. Do you enjoy speaking English? ☐ Yes ☐ No

10. Do you look for opportunities to speak English in and out of the classroom?

☐ Yes ☐ No

11. Do you have enough confidence to have short conversations in English?

☐ Yes ☐ No

12. How do you prefer to practice English? ☐ In class ☐ Outside the class

13. How do you learn better? ☐ By myself ☐ With a partner ☐ In teams

14. Which is the skill you wish to improve the most?

☐ Listening

☐ Reading

☐ Speaking

☐ Writing

Thanks for your participation!